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ABSTRACT

The Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Act) is a federal program that assists states in operating a system of early intervention supports and services for infants and toddlers with special needs and their families. In Colorado, the Part C initiative is called Early Childhood Connections (ECC). As the lead agency, the Colorado Department of Education is charged with implementing ECC, the statewide comprehensive, coordinated system of supports and services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and their families. To accomplish this charge, ECC promotes a broad array of interrelated activities. Among ECC's initiatives are those focusing on public awareness, service coordination, cultural competence, and parent leadership. One other such initiative, Babies BELONG, focuses on assuring the quality of early intervention supports and services. It is the belief and policy of ECC that supports and services are most effective when they are provided within families' everyday routines, activities, and places. This guidebook describes this vision for early intervention services in order to assist communities in assuring quality supports and services for infants and toddlers and their families in Colorado. The guide explains ECC's guiding principles, key concepts, background information on which ECC's positions are based, Colorado's policy on provision of services in natural environments, and the Babies BELONG initiative. (Contains 22 references.) (EV)

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A Guidebook

Early Intervention Supports & Services in Everyday Routines, Activities, and Places in Colorado

Early Childhood Connections for Infants, Toddlers & Families

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A Guidebook

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Introduction

The Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (Part C of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is a federal program that assists states in operating a system of early intervention supports and services for infants and toddlers with special needs, birth to three years, and their families. In Colorado the Part C initiative is called Early Childhood Connections. As the lead agency, the Colorado Department of Education is charged with implementing Early Childhood Connections (ECC), the statewide, comprehensive, coordinated system of supports and services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and their families. To accomplish this charge, ECC promotes a broad array of interrelated activities. Among ECC's initiatives are those focusing on public awareness, service coordination, cultural competence, and parent leadership. One other such initiative, Babies BELONG, focuses on assuring the quality of early intervention supports and services.

...one of the primary purposes of early intervention is to enhance the capacity of families to support their children's well-being, development, learning, and full participation in their communities.

How do we recognize quality in early intervention supports and services? As articulated in Part C of IDEA, one of the primary purposes of early intervention is to enhance the capacity of families to support their children's well-being, development, learning, and full participation in their communities. It follows that, in large part, the quality of early intervention is measured by how effectively supports and services achieve this purpose. It is the belief and policy of Early Childhood Connections that:

Supports and services are most effective when they are provided in families' everyday routines, activities, and places. Where and when supports and services are provided are essential elements of quality. Equally important to quality are the elements of what and how services are delivered. Services provided in everyday routines, activities, and places, must also be developmentally appropriate and relevant to families' lives.

This position is derived from many sources, including what families tell us about their experiences, research findings, advances in practice, and legislative policy.

The purpose of this Guidebook is to describe a vision for early intervention services to assist communities in assuring quality supports and services for infants and toddlers and their families throughout Colorado.

Guiding Principles

Early Intervention Supports & Services in Everyday Routines, Activities, and Places

1. All children are unique, with their individual strengths and talents. The presence of a disability or special need is not the defining characteristic of any child.

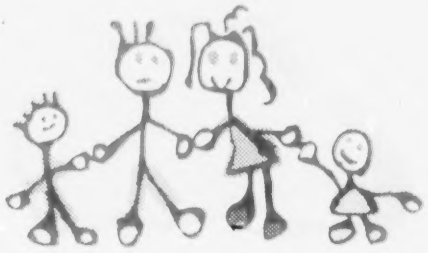
2. Children grow and develop in the context of relationships with their families and other caregivers.

3. All children have the right to belong, to be welcomed, and to participate fully in the typical places and activities of their communities.

4. Children with and without special needs learn important things from one another.

5. Everyday routines, activities, and places offer countless opportunities for children to learn and develop.

6. The lives of families are enhanced when they are successful in maintaining their everyday lives and relationships.



Key Concepts

Early Intervention Supports & Services in Everyday Routines, Activities, and Places

Early intervention supports and services should be delivered in settings and during activities which are determined by the child's needs, the desired functional outcomes, and the family's life-style and routines. *Family routines* are the usual events that are customarily a part of families' schedules. These routines might include meal time, bath time, play time, car rides, and nap time. *Everyday activities* that a family does with their infant or toddler might include such things as having fun at the playground, going for a walk, spending time with friends at a playgroup, shopping, and going to the library. *Everyday places* are those that families and typically developing children frequent, day-in and day-out, including the home, the neighborhood, and community programs such as a recreation center, library, park, or store.

Early intervention supports and services should be delivered in settings and during activities which are determined by the child's needs, the desired functional outcomes, and the family's life-style and routines.

Supports and services should:

- occur in the child's regular environments;
- include the child's siblings, care providers, other family members, and friends;
- discover the child's talents and gifts and support them in the context of typical play and relationships;
- apply specialized expertise to adapt and accommodate routines, activities, and places to support the child's full participation and learning.

There are other essential features of quality early intervention supports and services. Services provided in everyday routines, activities, and places, must also be *developmentally appropriate* and *relevant to families' lives*.

Developmentally Appropriate

It is well founded in both research and practice that developmentally appropriate practices enhance learning and development for all children. Developmentally appropriate practices are responsive to, and respectful of, individual children. Developmentally appropriate practice is the process of families and professionals planning and providing supports and services based on:

1. knowledge of child development and learning;
2. the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child; and
3. an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which each individual child lives to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for that child and his or her family. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

It is through the integration of these three aspects that decisions are made regarding the best ways to meet a child's needs and support their participation in everyday life.

By listening to families, service providers can plan with families how to keep supports and services relevant.

Relevant to Families' Lives

A primary purpose of early intervention is to enhance the capacity of families to support their children's development and learning. In order to achieve this, supports and services need to be relevant to families' lives. Early intervention services need to address families' concerns, priorities, and resources as well as "fitting" the context of their culture, life-style, and schedules.

Providers need to focus on this relevancy from the very beginning of their relationship with a family, from the initial stages of identification through the development of an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP). Service providers can keep their supports and services relevant by listening to, and planning with, families. Through conversations focused on the perspectives of the entire family, practitioners can learn what family members currently do and want to do in the future, key individuals in their lives, and how best to blend early intervention services and supports so that children participate fully and families can maintain ordinary lives and relationships.

Background Information

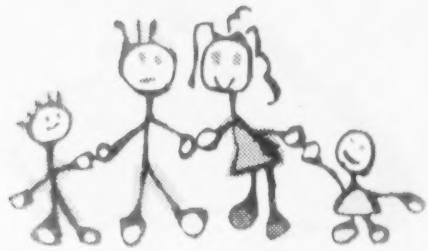
Early Intervention Supports & Services in Everyday Routines, Activities, and Places

Early Childhood Connections' position on quality early intervention supports and services is derived from many sources, including what families tell us about their experiences, research findings, advances in practice, and legislative policy. This section highlights key points that have been learned from these sources.

Experiences of Families

The capacity of parents to support a child is enhanced when services are provided as part of the child's typical daily experiences and in the context of the family's everyday life.

The evolution of quality early intervention services has been greatly influenced by the voices of families. Family members have shared their ideas, stories, and experiences in Colorado and nationally, through legislative hearings, policy development forums, program evaluation efforts, and family satisfaction surveys. The guiding principles and elements of quality early intervention supports and services have been greatly influenced by many of the reflections that families have shared about themselves and about what they want from service providers. Some of these reflections are shared below:



Having a child with a disability does not mean that there is something "wrong" with a family, nor does it change the essence of who they are. Disability is something that can happen to anyone. When a child has a disability, it adds a new dimension to a family's life that needs to be incorporated into their planning and life-style. Parents want to do what is best for their children. Families have tremendous capacity to support their children's learning and development within the context of their daily interactions and activities. Parents want to have fun with their kids and do the typical things that families do. Families have very full and busy lives. Families know their children in ways that no one else can. Having a child with a disability is a complication, and sometimes an inconvenience – it is not a tragedy. Families love their kids.

The capacity of parents to support a child who happens to have a disability is enhanced when services are provided as part of the child's typical daily experiences and in the context of the family's everyday life. Providers can help by blending therapy services into daily activities and routines instead of giving families "one more thing to do". Providers can help family members gain many useful insights and skills by embedding therapeutic strategies into everyday life. Offering services in everyday routines,

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activities, and places helps family members maintain ordinary lives and relationships. Families risk losing their sense of "normalcy" when too much emphasis is put on therapy or when it is only offered in ways that pull the child and family away from typical activities. Therapists have a profound impact when they help families understand their child's disability and unique needs while at the same time helping them to appreciate how their child's individual characteristics and abilities will develop through incidental learning, enriching experiences, and building strong relationships.

Providers will come and go in the life of a child. The family is the constant throughout the child's lifespan. From the earliest stages of a child's life, the family must learn to be effective observers, supporters, teachers, and advocates. Family members want to be treated and supported as skilled allies.

One of the greatest heartaches for a family – any family – is when their child is excluded. One of the greatest gifts that service providers can offer is helping a child participate in everyday life.

◆ Research Findings

There is an increasing body of research-based literature that lends support that early intervention services should be: 1) provided in everyday routines, activities, and places; 2) developmentally appropriate; and 3) relevant to the lives of families.

Research Supporting The Provision Of Services In Everyday Routines, Activities, And Places

It is well established that learning occurs best when children learn and practice skills in the settings and within the routines in which they would typically use those same skills. The use of everyday routines, activities, and places as a context for early intervention services builds on the functional skills approach (Cipani & Spooner, 1994; Snell 1993) and provides numerous ways to incorporate these skills into daily routines (Cripe, Hanline, & Daley, 1997). Daily routines and activities also have long been considered to be the ideal context for developmentally appropriate practice in the education of young children (Bredekamp, 1987). Many naturally occurring routines and activities can serve as development-enhancing opportunities, and research has shown that these opportunities can optimize learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Hunt, 1979). Providing early intervention services within the child's daily living routines and situations increases the number of learning opportunities and enhances the meaningfulness of what is learned. The child is provided an

Many naturally occurring routines and activities can serve as development enhancing opportunities, and research has shown that these opportunities can optimize learning.

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opportunity to acquire skills within the context of daily life rather than in contrived learning situations that do not represent real life challenges (Dunst, Mahoney & Buchan, 1996). Finally, the child develops generalizable and functional skills that strengthen his or her competence to cope with a range of changing environmental demands (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Hart and Risely, 1995).

Research Supporting Developmentally Appropriate Practice

It has been well documented that play is an essential component to early cognitive, social, and language development (Hunt, 1961; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1962). Infants and toddlers explore and engage their environments using all of their sensory systems. Every day of the young child's life presents new developmental challenges and new responses by family members and caregivers.

There is a growing body of research that supports the importance of family-centered practices...

Interventions that incorporate developmentally appropriate practices, defined as age appropriate and individually appropriate (Bredekamp, 1991), have the capability of effectively fostering social interactions between caregivers and young children with disabilities (Mahoney, Robinson, & Powell, 1992). A goal of early intervention is to foster the child's acquisition and use of developmental skills and processes (Linder, 1993). Developmentally appropriate practice incorporates enjoyable play activities, thereby encouraging attention to, and retention of, skills gained in play.

Research Supporting Services That Are Relevant To Families' Lives

There is a growing body of research that supports the importance of family-centered practices and early intervention services that are relevant to families' lives. Family-centered practices are based on family needs and desires which guide all aspects of service delivery and strengthen a family's capacity to meet their own needs (McBride, Brotherson, Joanning, Whiddon, and Demmitt, 1993). Through family-centered practices, families are active decision-makers in the planning and implementation of services that support their children's well-being, development, learning, and full participation in their communities. In addition, family-centered interventions strive to enhance and support families as they accommodate the needs of their children with disabilities (Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991; Robinson, Rosenberg, and Beckman, 1988). Early intervention services that are relevant to the lives of families have been found to reduce stress and increase empowerment (Thompson, Lobb, Elling, Herman, Jurkiewicz, & Hulleza, 1997).

◆ Advances in Practice

Health, education, early childhood, and human service disciplines are dynamic – practices change as experience and knowledge increase. This continual evolution of practice has been a hallmark of services to young children. Many of the recent advances in early intervention reflect the research and legislative policy described elsewhere in this Guidebook. Four of these highly interrelated advances are described below.

→ Functional Approaches: Intervention has been increasingly focused on helping young children learn the skills they need to get along as independently as possible in their everyday lives. To do this, many providers are addressing skill development in the context of children's daily activities such as mealtime, playing, and socializing. By providing intervention in this context, practitioners directly support children's immediate participation, rather than focusing on skill development out of the context of the child's daily activities and routines. By focusing on children's participation, families and other caregivers recognize how to use the many learning opportunities that naturally occur in a child's daily life to enhance skill development. In addition, providers assist children and families in maintaining connections to their typical routines, relationships, and communities.

.....many providers are addressing skill development in the context of children's daily activities such as mealtime, playing, and socializing.

→ Family-Centered Services: Service providers have increasingly recognized that families are the center of their children's lives. Providers have been working more closely with families to establish individualized plans for achieving functional goals for children. As part of the planning process, parents and providers work together to identify areas that are most relevant to the family. This collaborative process offers numerous opportunities for providers and families to complement each other's unique contributions in facilitating the child's development.

→ Service Integration: Historically, services have been somewhat isolated from one another along agency and/or discipline lines. Recently, services for young children and their families are less fragmented as disciplines are working more closely together in the interests of the child's overall development and the family's priorities.

→ Service Settings: The settings for services for infants and toddlers with disabilities have been expanding. In the past almost all services were provided in specialized settings -- more recently, many providers are supporting children to participate and learn in typical everyday places. Recognizing that children learn when they are interested and engaged, practitioners are building on learning opportunities within and across environments that focus on children's everyday interests, interactions, and routines.

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◆ Legislative Policy

The provision of supports and services in everyday routines, activities, and places is supported by requirements in federal law to provide early intervention services in natural environments. Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines natural environments as "settings that are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disabilities" (34 C.F.R. §303.18) and includes a requirement for providing early intervention services for infants and toddlers in these natural environments. The law (IDEA) requires service systems to include policies and procedures that will ensure early intervention services are provided in natural environments. Although the phrase "natural environment" is used in the federal statute, it is the federal regulations that provide us with a working definition. Early intervention services "must be provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate" (34 C.F.R. § 303.12).

Early intervention services "must be provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate."

The IDEA regulations also call for the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) to address the provision of early intervention services in natural environments (34 C.F.R. § 303.167). This family service plan document is based upon the needs, interests, and priorities of the infant or toddler and the family and upon desired functional outcomes. Individual functional outcomes, as addressed in the IFSP, must be relevant to the family's lifestyle, culture and routine. Thus, the IFSP serves as the conduit through which functional outcomes can be met using appropriate supports and services in settings that are natural or normal for each infant or toddler and family.

In addition to the requirement that an IFSP include the natural environments in which services will be provided, the document must also include a justification of the extent, if any, to which these services will not be provided in the natural environment (34 C.F.R. § 303.344(d)(ii)). The provision of early intervention services for any infant or toddler occurs in a setting other than a natural environment only if functional goals cannot be achieved satisfactorily for the infant or toddler in a natural environment.

Colorado's state plan, which was submitted in response to federal statutory and regulatory requirements, includes policy on how the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), as lead agency, will ensure that legal requirements under Part C are met.

Colorado's Policy: Service Options - Provision of Services in Natural Environments

The provision of supports and services for infants and toddlers in natural environments is required by federal law. Part C of IDEA defines early intervention as "developmental services that to the maximum extent appropriate, are provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate."

In order to receive federal Part C funds, states are required to submit policies and procedures for implementing the provision in IDEA about providing services in natural environments. The following excerpt was included in Colorado's state plan for Part C, and has been federally approved. This policy establishes the set of standards for how local communities will provide supports and services for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

To the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child and family, every community must ensure that early intervention supports and services are provided in settings that the family has identified as a natural environment...

"To the maximum extent appropriate, supports and services will be provided in natural environments and will only be provided in other settings when services cannot be achieved satisfactorily in natural environments. To the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child and family, every community must ensure that early intervention supports and services are provided in settings that the family has identified as a natural environment, meaning the home, neighborhood and community settings in which children without disabilities participate. Services will only be provided in other settings when they cannot be provided in natural settings and the justification, based upon the needs of the child and related to their functional outcomes, is documented on the IFSP.

The overriding consideration in selection of the setting in which a service or support will be provided is that the selection for each child must be determined on an individual basis according to the child's need(s), and functional outcomes as described on the IFSP and be relevant to the family's life-style, culture and routines."

In order to assist local communities to implement this policy, a set of procedures has been adopted. These procedures appear in the *Colorado State Plan for Part C of IDEA*. To obtain a copy, please contact Early Childhood Connections at the Colorado Department of Education, (303) 866-6710.

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About the Babies BELONG Initiative

The *BELONG* in ECC's Babies BELONG initiative stands for *Babies' Early Learning Opportunities Nurture Growth.* The purpose of this initiative is to promote supports and services that are: provided in everyday routines, activities, and places; that are developmentally appropriate; and that are relevant to families' lives. The Babies BELONG initiative sponsors and creates links with a variety of activities. These activities, described below, are designed to share the guiding principles and facilitate the state and local implementation
of quality early intervention supports and services in Colorado. Numerous stakeholders, who are key partners in this initiative, include:

- parents and parent groups;
- service providers, including service coordinators, therapists, early childhood specialists, physicians, educators, and administrators;
- the Colorado Interagency Coordinating Council;
- professional organizations;
- institutions of higher education; and
- state agencies responsible for implementing the spirit and requirements of Part C of IDEA (Education, Public Health and Environment, Human Services, and Health Care Policy and Financing).

Collaborative Activities: This initiative creates and supports opportunities for stakeholders to collaboratively address the implications of the information in this Guidebook. Focus groups, planning meetings, problem-solving sessions, and other collaborative forums occur at both statewide and local levels.

Public Awareness Activities: Babies BELONG produces and disseminates materials to families, providers, and other stakeholders throughout Colorado to provide information about quality early intervention supports and services.

Education and Training Activities: A variety of educational activities help to provide increased knowledge and skills. By making videotapes, print materials, and training programs widely available, this initiative infuses information about quality early intervention practices in preservice curricula, inservice training, and all ECC initiatives and activities.

Local Community Capacity Building: This initiative provides technical assistance to local communities to assist them in building their capacity to support the participation of all infants and toddlers in all age appropriate settings and activities.

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